

SITUATION REPORT NO. 4
INCIDENT NO. 2000-016
DATE: May 26, 2000 TIME: 12:00 p.m.

TO: Governor Edward T. Schafer
State Capitol
Bismarck, N.D. 58505

1. NATURE OF DISASTER: Moisture Conditions – Related Problems: High water tables, resulting from seven years of consecutive flooding, continue to cause safety- and health-related problems in some areas in north central, south central and southeast North Dakota. Flooding conditions continue in the Devils Lake area. Devils Lake remains near its historic high level as thousands of acres remain inundated while transportation routes, other infrastructure and communities, as well as rural areas, are threatened. Meanwhile dry conditions that impacted spring planting and that have resulted in grass fires in many areas of North Dakota have improved. Dry conditions still persist in the extreme northeast and along the central portion of the Montana border.
2. DEATHS AND INJURIES: No change from previous reports.
3. DAMAGES: Devils Lake at Creel Bay measured 1,446.03 feet mean sea level (msl) on May 26.

In the Devils Lake Basin, high ground water tables continue to damage sewer and water lines in the city of Minnewaukan. Officials have reported cracked and collapsed segments of pipe, ground water infiltration, mineral deposits and cracked and shifted pipe joints. Residents have also indicated that their driveways and sidewalks are sinking and that cement basement walls are deteriorating.

High winds in mid-May caused shoulder erosion and washouts on roadways in both Pierce and McHenry Counties. Many roads repaired under last year's disaster declaration are in need of repair again because of the winds and high water tables. Additionally, residents have reported problems with sewer systems. Drain fields are no longer working because of high water tables. Within a one week period, Pierce County received approximately 1.5 to 2 inches of rain, while McHenry County recorded 2.5 to 3 inches.

The greening up of the countryside has increased during the past four weeks, limiting the risk of fire danger, the National Weather Service (NWS) reported. Recent wet years have led to abundant dried grassy fuel in the early spring when conditions are still dry and brown. Earlier this spring, hundreds of grass fires were reported throughout the state as high winds spread flames, compounding fire control problems. Counties that enacted burning bans included Walsh and Pembina.

4. RESOURCES:
LOCAL: No change from previous reports.
STATE: No change from previous reports.
FEDERAL: No change from previous reports.

5. VOLUNTEER ACTION: No change from previous reports.
6. MAJOR ACTIONS: The State Flood Coordination Center (SFCC) meeting was held on May 18, 2000. Group discussion took place as follows:

North Dakota Emergency Management

Although the lake level is approximately one foot below last year's record high of 1,447.2 feet, flooding still persists in causing problems for the Devils Lake area. Officials remain cautious as future precipitation events could still be a factor regarding lake levels. High waters continue to threaten infrastructure, and mental health professionals have reported an increase in the number of flood victims seeking assistance. While flooding is not of the magnitude of previous years, members of the SFCC still need to work together to develop solutions to any problems that may arise and give continued attention to existing needs.

N.D. State Water Commission (SWC)

Hydrologic Update:

Devils Lake is currently at approximately 1,446.2 feet mean sea level (msl). The lake has remained within 0.1 feet of this elevation since the first of the year. This is about one foot lower than the all-time recorded daily high of 1,447.2 feet msl that occurred last summer.

Jerusalem Outlet:

The N.D. National Guard removed six inches of sediment from the high area separating Devils Lake and Stump Lake. The SWC provided engineering and surveying support, while the Devils Lake Joint Board obtained permission from the landowner for the state. Removal of the sediment lowered the high point from 1,447 to 1,446.5 feet and will improve flow to Stump Lake if Devils Lake exceeds 1,446.5 feet. The state, along with the Joint Board and the City of Devils Lake, continues to pursue removal of the vegetation in the channel, to further improve flow. The Joint Board sprayed the cattails; the effectiveness of this effort is currently under evaluation.

SWC's Project to Move Water from Devils Lake to Stump Lake:

The SWC is still awaiting word from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regarding the 404 permit it had applied for last summer to excavate the channel from Devils Lake to Stump Lake. The project would lower portions of the channel to elevation 1,439 feet and provide a 50-foot channel bottom to allow efficient and controlled movement of water between the two lakes. A major concern with the permit is project compatibility with the Stump Lake National Wildlife Refuge. To aid with the refuge compatibility issue, the SWC added an operating plan for the channel that allowed only the water that would cause Devils Lake to exceed elevation 1,447 feet to be moved to Stump Lake.

Extended Storage Acreage Program:

The State Water Commission and Devils Lake Joint Water Resource Board entered into an agreement to offer longer-term water storage contracts for interested individuals within the Devils Lake Basin. Applications for the Extended Storage Acreage Program (ESAP) are being accepted.

N.D. Parks and Recreation Department, Devils Lake State Parks

This summer, the focus of construction work will shift from elevating flood-threatened properties to rebuilding camping sites lost to flood waters of previous years. Park officials are concerned that there will not be enough camping facilities (private and public) in the Devils Lake area to accommodate all the people that will want to camp in the area this year.

Efforts are underway to reclaim camping sites lost to flood waters at Grahams Island Park. Only 48 of 122 camping sites are functional this year. Of the original 122 sites, 85 were electrical. Only six electrical sites are functional for this summer. Work also continues on efforts to relocate facilities damaged by flooding in prior years.

The Shelters Grove and Black Tiger Bay parks were rescheduled to reopen with few problems.

North Dakota Department of Transportation (DOT), Devils Lake District

The contractor is making good progress on the grade raise on N.D. Highway 20, north of Acorn Ridge and near Camp Grafton. Crews should complete this portion by the end of July. This project will be paved this fall in conjunction with the project to pave the highway from the Spirit Lake Casino to Ski Jump Road. These projects are built to an elevation of 1,455 feet.

Staff at DOT has plans ready but no right of way purchased to relocate N.D. Highway 1 at Stump Lake. The highway measures 1,411 feet in elevation. If needed, DOT could bid this project on short notice.

A consulting engineer has been hired, and several meetings have been held on work to be done on flood-threatened U.S. Highway 2 west of Devils Lake.

Bids were received last fall on a special contract to perform emergency riprap repairs on all the area lake crossings if high winds cause erosion, damage to riprap or heavy debris deposition. The contractor on this project will be required to react on very short notice to make necessary emergency repairs. DOT reported that some damage occurred during a recent windstorm; damage will be repaired through this contract.

The Devils Lake Surface Transportation Task Force has requested a change in emergency repair (ER) regulations that would allow the state to be more proactive in dealing with road problems caused by Devils Lake flooding. The change would allow DOT to raise the roads if they are within three feet of inundation. DOT is working with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to establish guidelines for determining which roads are eligible and how to obligate additional money.

The grade raises on N.D. Highway 20 at Mission Bay and Black Tiger Bay were completed and paved. These two sites, as well as other locations, are acting as dikes and can't be raised again until a determination is made on the request to change ER regulations. The Mission Bay and Black Tiger Bay sites were raised to 1,452.75 feet.

N.D. Department of Human Services (DHS)

The Disaster Outreach Program staff hosted a site review from the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the North Dakota Department of Human Services (DHS). While program staff is awaiting the written report and recommendations, preliminary exit comments suggest that the site review was productive. The team's comments suggest a much better understanding about the current, relatively unique challenges facing people affected by the flood in the Devils Lake Basin. While current program funding runs out in August, 2000, the team suggested that funding may be extended, perhaps for an additional three- to six-month period.

In addition to following up with contacts with individuals to provide support and to make referrals to an array of possible solution-based resources, our program has continued to explore and develop more "system-wide" program solutions. Staff members have to support

the Fare for All food program, and monthly registrations continue to climb. Staff members have continued to work closely with the HandS (Helping and Support Hands) Interfaith Coalition.

The outreach workers have also started to research and conceptualize the effects of long-term stress on communities. In the sense that "fine steel is made with hot fire," the goal is to identify and support those solutions that lead to resiliency in individuals and communities. Outreach workers are concerned about the individual, political and funding resources that have been diverted toward flood response solutions, but at the cost of accessing these limited resources for meeting the human needs of people in the Devils Lake Basin.

North Central Planning Council (NCPC)

NCPC continues to progress with efforts to administer the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) acquisition project for the city of Churchs Ferry. To date, \$2,852,000 has been obligated for acquisition of residences, commercial lots and commercial buildings. Fifty-six appraisals have been made on occupied and unoccupied homes. Forty-seven offers have been made, and to date, 42 have accepted. Five commercial appraisals have been made with offers made and three accepted. The first group of homes has been offered for sale to the highest bidder and allowing the original owner to match the high bid. A second group is currently up for bid. NCPC is administering the grant in cooperation with North Dakota Emergency Management.

Nelson County Emergency Management

County residents have submitted applications for a disaster-related housing rehabilitation grant that the Red River Regional Council has made available for Pembina, Walsh, Nelson and Grand Forks Counties. In Nelson County, the guideline for 1999 annual gross income is less than \$23,600 for a two-person household and \$29,500 for a four-person household. Each county has a board that will review applications. The board includes county officials and representatives of the county, banks and churches.

Nelson County officials reported inequities in NFIP (National Flood Insurance Program) premiums for some residents who live in areas not considered at high risk of flooding. However, their areas are considered Zone D, areas in which flood hazards are undetermined. Mapping is underway and may be completed by the end of 2000. Mortgage companies are requiring NFIP insurance for their properties.

Nelson County received a \$4,400 grant for The Salvation Army to help address respite, day care and food pantry needs.

Benson County Emergency Management

Road sites, damaged by flood waters in previous years and repaired through disaster assistance programs, are being impacted by continued high lake levels, requiring repair. Contractors and county crews have been hauling gravel to repair damaged sites. A lack of federal and state matching funding prevents the county from conducting more extensive repairs.

Ramsey County Emergency Management

The Ramsey County Commission has voted to support the road/dike alternative that has been presented by the Devils Lake Surface Transportation Task Force. The commission further supports use of 100 percent federal funds for this alternative. A team of federal, state and local agencies studied five alternatives for protecting areas of the Spirit Lake Reservation and Ramsey County where roads are acting as dams. Alternatives ranged from taking no action to using existing road alignments for lake level protection.

Ramsey County officials are pursuing a reconsideration of a decision by the NFIP that prevents owners of South Acorn Ridge area structures for qualifying for an endorsement of NFIP requirements. That endorsement, designed for owners of closed basin lake structures, allows the NFIP to relocate homes when inundation is imminently threatened.

Ramsey County officials anticipate numerous uses of a comprehensive risk assessment to identify elevations of structures in the Devils Lake Basin. The assessment includes one-foot contour elevations, identification of structures and dimensions, center lines of roads, levees and railways and detailed aerial photography. The work was conducted in partnership by FEMA and the State of North Dakota as part of a risk assessment for Ramsey, Benson, Nelson and Towner Counties and the Spirit Lake Nation.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

The City of Devils Lake Flood Control project is essentially complete. USACE personnel will maintain an office in Devils Lake to complete project documentation and finalize project work.

USACE personnel will continue to work with federal, state and local emergency response officials on plans for responding to rising lake levels.

The Devils Lake Surface Transportation Task Force working group completed work on the assessment of 'roads acting as dams' report. The final report was distributed to Task Force members and local public officials. The report was presented to the Lake Emergency Management Committee at a meeting in Devils Lake on May 9.

General Discussion

The group agreed to suspend SFCC meetings until this fall unless the current situation changes.

7. ASSISTANCE NEEDED: With the exception of continuing technical support, no additional assistance has been requested.
8. OUTSIDE HELP ON SCENE: No outside assistance has been reported at this time.
9. OTHER: Situation Reports published by North Dakota Emergency Management are posted on the Division's Internet home page. The address is: <http://www.state.nd.us/dem>.

Douglas C. Friez, State Director